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Radio hams testing emergency capability

Amateur radio enthusiasts, known as hams, are testing their emergency capabilities this weekend at four sites in the Milwaukee area.

The test, run continuously from 1 p.m. Saturday to 2 p.m. today, is part of the 46th annual American Radio Relay League field day emergency preparedness test.

The Relay League is made up of Canadian and United States radio amateurs. Thousands of hams in the two countries set up stations in the open, using only emergency power — generators or batteries — and portable antennas. They contact as many other hams as possible in the test period. Some will communicate via satellites available for ham use.

"These tests are designed to help hams refine operating skills so necessary during disasters and times of emergency, when normal channels of communications are disrupted or unavailable," according to H. Charles Kaetel, business manager of the Milwaukee Radio Amateurs Club and an assistant director of the central division of the Relay League.

The four local sites may be visited by the public during the test. The four participating clubs, and their locations, are:

West Allis Amateur Radio Club: In a field next to a baseball diamond on College Ave. about two blocks east of Highway 100 in Hales Corners.

Ozaukee Radio Club: Lazy Days Campground, seven miles west of Fredonia on Highway A. The campground charges a visitor fee.

Milwaukee Radio Amateurs Club: The old Nike missile site in Menomonee Falls on the east side of Lannon Rd., one mile north of Lannon.

Kettle Moraine Radio Amateur Club: Hillcrest Park near the intersection of Davidson Rd. and Highway Y in Waukesha County.